



Right Here! Right Now!

Once again, Wei-Ling Gallery's annual 18@8 exhibition is back, kicking off the start of 2017. The exhibition has a long and meaningful history to the gallery, its first edition being the debut of Wei-Ling Gallery's space in Brickfields in 2005. This year's edition, titled *18@8 RIGHT HERE! RIGHT NOW!* calls for 11 artists to look within to come up with a work which is more introspective, and perhaps a true reflection of who they are today and what their work stands for now – in the times that we are living in.

The 11 artists have also each been given a glass bubble, to reinterpret, in a tribute to the Corum Bubble watch with the theme, 'Craft Your dreams' The glass bubbles, will then be auctioned off to benefit a charity. Two artists; Ruzzeki Harris and Wong Chee Meng have also been invited to partake in a live performance in collaboration with Google, to launch the Google Tilt Brush in Malaysia. The performance includes the use of the Tilt Brush – a new virtual reality app that allows the user to paint in three dimensions on a digital platform.

As we talk about the current events of today, many questions come to mind. According to Steven Pinker's book 'The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined', we are living in the most peaceful time in world history. Albeit, civil wars still being fought in Middle-eastern and African countries, mass shootings across the United States, religious genocide in Myanmar, random terrorist acts around the world, human-trafficking across Asia, the bleak list just goes on and on. Of course, Steven Pinker's statement is backed up by hard true facts and comparisons between then and now; but should we really take his word for it, or should we as conscious human beings, really open our eyes, and look for ourselves at today's state of affairs? Have we learnt from our past mistakes or are we merely repeating history?

Ivan Lam's 'To Forgive' reflects on the horrors of World War II, that his grandmother had lived through; the Japanese invasion of Malaysia. It consists of a hand-sewn quilt by his grandmother, that was given to him at the age of 12. The work is visually simple, a quilt wrapped around a board and encased in resin. On the lower half of the work, a cropped logo of the upcoming 2020 Tokyo Olympics serves as an ironic reflection of the past. "The axe forgets what the tree remembers", an African proverb lies across the top half of the work, in a tribute to his grandmother and the



tribulations she faced having lived through a painful and ugly war. Although the proverb speaks of the past, it is still heavily applicable to the situation in many parts of world today, with many “axes” and “trees” still at work - as men, women and children are forced to flee their homes, due to forces beyond their control, not knowing what the future holds.

In a continuation of the displacement of people in the world due to crisis, Chong Kim Chiew’s practice revolves around the mapping of people and their movement. In this series of work, the maps are a “tracing” of his travels throughout Malaysia. With his “Body and Border” series, Chong is taking the sense of identity in movement to a more literal and personal sense. As half and quarter human figures are seen with maps painted on them. For the artist, our body itself is a secret, complex and overlapping map; our blood vessels pose as a mental note that our movement resembles a slim-flowing river, an endless migration. From the beginning of our birth to our untimely death, we (our body) move and migrate to different places. The residue of this movement is what the element of complexity and overlapping becomes.

Choy Chun Wei, on the other hand, seeks a different sense of identity through his complex collage constructions. In many parts of the world, Asia in particular, an introduction, is most often done so with a name card. Hence, the job depicted on your name card then becomes your immediate and associated identity and existence. Choy binds together a collection of name cards from his travels. He seeks to bring a reflected perspective on contemporary human existence, specifically the commodification process that is currently taking place in today’s society. A bricolage of identities, yet ones that are only of surface value; communal intimacy is being lost amongst us. Instead, self-preservation seizes over through the physical existence of name cards.

According to psychology, the self is an assimilation of knowledge and experiences. Such is the case with Chin Kong Yee’s ‘Hamburg City Hall’. A painting that combines the East and West; Chin applies the techniques and mediums traditionally used in a Chinese ink painting, to a visual that is akin to an oil painting. The scene is a photograph he took while in Europe, it was then manipulated allowing him to have a clearer vision of his “altered reality”, reminding him of the smells, sounds and sense of



the place, which he then captures in his work. Chin's painting is a visual representation of opposing dualities that have been merged together through memory of time and place.

Opposing dualities is ever present in 'Collision' by Ruzzeki Harris. A diptych oil painting that depicts a pair of powdered wigs and boxing gloves. The boxing gloves are placed to simulate the wigs punching one another, engaging in a battle. 'Collision' looks at and questions judicial systems within Malaysia, where the judiciary is perhaps not as autonomous as it could be and is fighting against itself?

'2 Pigs' and 'Ms. September' by Sean Lean, further questions the state of Malaysia today in the conflicts between a conservative Islamic nation and its positioning as a modern democratic society. '2 Pigs', a title that is quite literal, shows two pigs in the act of fornication, but with the back half of the pigs distorted and censored. A similar technique is applied to 'Ms. September', the title refers to a former 'Playboy Playmate of the Month'. The lady lays on her back, in a seductive pose, whilst her entire torso is distorted and censored as well. Sean questions the sensitivity of the issues and themes that those in power want to shun, pacify and punish if brought up. How does one say things that do not want to be heard, to circumnavigate censorship both legally and culturally? In this day and age, the ordinary and banal can be deemed controversial.

From a broad outlook at the state of affairs in the country, Cheng Yen Pheng turns her eye inwards in an observation of the Malaysian condition and proffering her solution to it. She offers an alternative. "No Colour" is a collage of black and white photographs, the only hints of colour that can be seen are in the (innocent) drawings made by children, which have been stitched into the collage. The persons photographed - in spite of coming from different religious backgrounds and being of different ethnicities - all get along together. Cheng believes that the excessive movement of "colour" causes confusion, reasoning why she had eliminated all colour from the photographs. The collage is pinned onto a metal board, signifying the fragility of it all - one shift and everything collapses.



The fragility and breakdown of the environment is something which man is directly responsible for. Fauzan Omar's 'Welcoming July Till October' is a series of black and white paintings; a motif of leaves creating an intricate, overlapping composition. Fauzan seeks to create discourse on the ever-changing landscape of today; raising questions on the secrets, darkness and emptiness caused by forest fires. The title refers to the four months, in which, the haze blitzes South East Asia each year. Various groups and organizations offer individual – often conflicting – views on the origins of the fire, severity of the smoke and after effects, accusing assorted elements as being the root cause. Though the paintings are minimal in colour, they bear a substantial weight in meaning. Black assumes the role of the trees turning to ash and charcoal as they burn. White represents death, the colour of burial shrouds, a symbol of sparseness.

Conversely, Hamidi Hadi elevates us towards a more spiritual view of the environment and the space around us. Throughout his practice, Hamidi has often taken his inspiration from what nature has to offer. He explains that nature is something that is close to us, it surrounds us and we are living in its environment. 'Menakung di Muka Bumi I & II' is an expression of the existence of an artist in a single moment and space in time. It is a suggestion of the unity of senses, the awareness of the artist towards the changes and the laws of nature that become a part of life. Loosely translated, the word 'menakung' is 'an act of withholding' or 'catching something from falling off', similar to that of a reservoir. Hamidi's "reservoir" consists of his synchronicity with the land; the feeling of love and appreciation towards nature. The artist encourages us to be more thankful towards all that nature provides us.

Following through with the theme of spirituality, Yau Bee Ling believes that the physical landscape - the land, the sea and the sky has a preordained purpose and relationship for the human existence. As we involve ourselves with the landscape around us, we begin a search to encounter our state of being from the unconscious towards the conscious state. As an observer, we move or watch, we react or respond. Every gesture made resonates and manifests in the act of the work, entitled 'The New Landscape: Quivering'.



Finally, in the act of searching for oneself, one should search for ways to live a harmonious life; this is what Wong Chee Meng presents in 'The Harmony Life'. Wong believes that living a harmonious life is the core of happiness. However, he is aware that life is multifaceted; a combination of struggle, love, dissatisfaction, success, frustration and longing. The work culture of modern society has people getting so caught up with their work, that they barely have enough time to spare for their social lives. The painting is the process of searching for the chord of balance in life. To achieve work-life harmony, one should put time into the right things, or for the lack of a better saying, Work hard! Play Hard!

John Lim
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